

Slovenia

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Freedom of the Press

Slovenia's constitution and legal system guarantee freedom of speech and of the press. However, the law bars hate speech and incitement to intolerance or violence. Defamation remains a criminal offense that can result in imprisonment, and journalists can be legally compelled to reveal their sources. Media outlets for the most part operate without political interference. At times, however, they have faced lawsuits after reporting on controversies involving powerful political figures.

The Mass Media Act of 2006 established the “right of correction,” according to which anyone offended or insulted by information published in the media, even truthful information, can demand a “correction” published in the same space as the offending article. The government and large companies have utilized this law to demand corrections that in some cases have been longer than the original article. The rule hinders editorial independence and journalists' freedom to publish critical articles. In a controversial case in May 2013, the prominent blogger Mitja Kunstelj was convicted of defaming two journalists, sentenced to six months in jail, and ordered to pay each of the journalists €10,000 (\$13,000) in damages.

The 2003 Access to Public Information Act ensures free access to information. The Office of the Information Commissioner, an independent body established in 2005, is tasked with handling freedom of information requests and supervising the protection of personal data. The commissioner is nominated by the president and subject to approval by the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament. In July 2013, the Interior Ministry announced plans to extend the obligation to provide information to companies that are directly or indirectly owned or controlled by the state, as well as to other public bodies. The parliament approved the changes in a first reading in November, but they not been formally adopted by year's end.

The Ministry of Culture is the main regulatory body for print media and supervises the implementation of the Mass Media Act. It also handles complaints against the media from the public. Electronic media are regulated by the Post and Electronic Communications Agency. The agency's responsibilities include monitoring the content of radio and television broadcasts and stimulating competition within the broadcasting industry.

Janez Janša, who served as prime minister from 2004 to 2008, returned to power in 2012 but was dismissed by the parliament in February 2013 after an anticorruption agency reported that he had failed to declare assets worth roughly €200,000 (\$262,000); he was later convicted of accepting bribes. Janša's most recent tenure as prime minister was marked by the dismissal of numerous members of the supervisory board of the public broadcaster, Radiotelevizija Slovenija (RTV Slovenija), signaling growing government influence over the media. (The parliament selected five new board members in December 2013, and a permanent director general is expected to be elected in 2014.) In November 2012, a new commercial television station, Planet TV, made its debut under the ownership of the state-run Telekom Slovenije. Critics said the launch was contrary to Slovenian law, which forbids a telecommunications company from owning a television station, and claimed that Janša's administration had established the channel in order to promote progovernment views. However, the government does not actively censor the media. Janša's successor as prime minister, Alenka Bratušek, head of the center-left Positive Slovenia party, has cultivated a more friendly approach to the press and appears to have made herself and her administration readily available to Slovenian journalists.

Journalists are generally free from direct interference and attacks, with two exceptions occurring in 2013. In May, hackers launched a distributed denial-of-service (DDOS) attack against a number of Slovenian media outlets, knocking them offline temporarily. In April, vandals set fire to the vehicle of Miran Šubic, a reporter for the daily *Dnevnik*. Šubic said he suspected that the attack, which also damaged part of his home, was linked to his investigative work. The incident was unusual, as there have been very few cases of threats or physical harassment against Slovenian journalists in the past.

A wide variety of media outlets operate in Slovenia. There are eight daily and a number of weekly newspapers. Many of the weeklies report on local and regional issues and enjoy significant readership within the communities they cover. The country's major newspapers are privately owned, but some journalists have complained of a left-leaning view in the major dailies, suggesting that the right lacks sufficient representation in print media and that right-leaning viewpoints are sometimes effectively censored. The broadcasting sector includes both public and private stations. RTV Slovenija is required by law to air radio and television broadcasts that cater to the country's Italian and Hungarian ethnic minorities. The government-operated Slovene Press Agency (STA) publishes news in Slovenian and English and has permanent offices in several European cities as well as the United States. Internet penetration reached approximately 73 percent of the population in 2013. The government does not restrict access to the internet.

The transition to digital broadcasting has proceeded rapidly, and Slovenia boasts one of the highest internet protocol television (IPTV) penetration rates in Europe. However, the digitization of media has resulted in substantial declines in print media readership and revenues, leading many outlets to experiment with online pay walls. In a highly criticized move in 2012, the Janša government announced plans to reduce RTV Slovenija's funding from license fees by 10 percent. After the broadcaster publicly campaigned against the move, the government enacted a 5 percent cut, which went into effect in January 2013. However, Bratušek's administration scrapped the cuts in May, fully restoring the monthly fee.

Ownership of media outlets changes often, making the market unstable and difficult to monitor. Concentration of media ownership also remains an issue, as yet another attempt to sell the daily *Večer* failed in 2013. Delo, Slovenia's largest publishing company and owner of *Večer*, has been attempting to sell the newspaper since 2009, when the Office for the Protection of Competition ordered it to divest its stake in order to reduce excessive concentration in news and advertising.

Slovenia's media sector continues to experience financial difficulties, resulting in layoffs, decreased operations at media outlets, and increasingly difficult economic conditions for working journalists. Advertising in print media, television, and internet outlets had declined significantly in 2012, according to reports issued in early 2013. Despite these problems, Slovenia's Journalists' Union refused to support a 2013 austerity program that slashed pay and benefits for public-sector workers, even as most unions in the country signed the deal. Newspapers that are critical of the government have faced difficulty securing advertisers, and self-censorship is reportedly common among journalists who want to avoid problems with their employers.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

24

Legal Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

6

Political Environment

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

11

Economic Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

7